



# APLA's school bus safety campaign goes national

"ACTIVATE" is APLA's public affairs column. It is intended as an update for members on issues and trends relevant to APLA's public affairs. Comments and suggestions to [info@apla.com](mailto:info@apla.com) are welcome.

For several years, many of APLA's members have witnessed the consequences of horrific bus crashes and child pedestrian accidents. As plaintiff lawyers, too many of us have shared the anguish of parents whose children have been killed or injured at school bus stops, alighting from buses, or travelling on the bus itself.

A number of isolated school bus and child pedestrian accidents have occurred in most States, although to date, more incidents have occurred in country areas and seem to have occurred mostly in Queensland.

This year has seen two prominent examples of the urgent need for reform: the first being the death of a child pedestrian on her way to school in Bulli, NSW (June); the second a school charter bus accident near Mt Isa.

The incidents each prompted calls for reform, including an inquiry into child pedestrian safety (Staysafe NSW) and public comments from the Queensland President of the AMA, Dr Sondergeld, that he would never let his children travel in a bus not fitted with seatbelts.

Such calls for reform are not new. In fact, Rob Davis, APLA's National Vice President, has been campaigning for school bus safety reform in Queensland for a number of years. Sadly, however, governments have consistently placed economic rationalism ahead of the safety of school children, gambling that a major school bus tragedy will not occur during their term.

Until now, APLA's school bus safety activities in other states have been implemented on an ad hoc and a reactive basis. However, in June 2000, APLA's National Council made the deci-

sion to 'go national' and adopted the school bus safety campaign as its first national signature program. The campaign will be coordinated at the national level (by the National Public Affairs Manager and the Public Affairs Committee). It will aim for a consistent approach in each State and Territory, while accommodating the differences between States (such as the decision of the NSW Branch to focus solely on child pedestrian safety).

APLA's national school bus safety campaign was launched at the national conference on 26 October, generating widespread interest from national radio, television and print media. This presented an ideal opportunity for APLA to make public calls for nationwide reform, including:

- All school buses to be fitted with seat belts
- The elimination of standees on school buses
- Better identification of school buses
- Traffic calming around school buses

It is proposed that a national code containing these reforms be developed. The code could be implemented and enforced via legislation in each state and territory.

As part of the campaign, we will be holding discussions with Parents and Citizens' Associations, accident prevention organisations, medical associations, transport groups and teachers' unions across the country.

Organisations such as the NRMA, the Australian Medical Association (AMA) and Injuries Australia have already expressed an interest in school bus safety, and we hope that they will join forces with APLA to channel concerns and achieve workable solutions. 